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Notes: During World War II the United States Army's Eighth Air Force lost nearly 26,000 airmen. This is the story of 2d Lt Elbert S Wood, Jr., one of those who did not survive to become a veteran.

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Photos: Elbert S Wood, Jr as an air cadet, 1942; Vera Hiatt Wood and Elbert Stanley Wood, Sr in 1965; the Catholic cemetery in Michelbach where Lieutenant Wood was buried; a German fighter pilot's view in a head-on attack against a B-17 squadron; Route of the First Air Division and of the 306th Bomb Group; twin-engined Messerschmitt Bf-110 in 1943 or 1944; sketch by George W Soell "And there we were" from a prisoner of war book of Donald E Williams at Stalag 17; Wicked WAAC, skipping across a plowed field before crashing; Lieutenant Wood's landing site on the bank of the Kahl River; Route of the two bomber streams on their way to Schweinfurt; Andres Noll, burgermeister of Michelbach; a Missing Air Crew Report No 821

Or Go Down in Flame

A Navigator's Death Over Schweinfurt*

By W. Raymond Wood

A Lost Airman

During World War II the United States Army's Eighth Air Force lost nearly 26,000 airmen, killed in the effort to destroy the war potential of the German Third Reich. The Eighth Air Force, stationed in England, was composed of more than 200,000 men—the flesh-and-blood components of the greatest air force in history. The mission of that force: to destroy the military potential of the Nazi war machine by the surgical destruction of those essential industrial elements needed to conduct modern war. The story of their efforts to carry out their often impossible orders has been told by many veterans of that long and bitter campaign.¹ Yet these stories, written by the living, illuminate only part of the countless human tragedies that accompanied the air war over Europe. This is the story of 2d Lt. Elbert S. Wood, Jr., one of those 26,000 airmen who did not survive to become a veteran.

His father, Elbert S. Wood, Sr., was the station agent for the Chicago and North Western Railroad in Cody, a small town in the Sand Hills of northwestern Nebraska. As the station agent, Elbert, Sr., was the medium by which telegrams from the secretary of war were delivered to the next of kin announcing casualties of war. He was to decipher, record, and personally deliver to his neighbors throughout the war many such messages announcing that a son or husband was missing or had been killed in action. Delivering these telegrams was the

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hardest duty he ever had to perform. Standing in the doorway with a telegram, he could never fully conceal his emotions from a family that rarely misunderstood the reason for his hat-in-hand visit.

When the keys began tapping on the telegraph in Wood's office on the morning of October 26, 1943, he began recording a message announcing that 2d Lt. Elbert S. Wood, Jr., was "reported missing in action since fourteen October over Schweinfurt Germany." It was a discouraging (but not hopeless) communication, and one that left the family in helpless anticipation for two and one-half months. What had happened?

When the lines began transmitting Elbert Wood's name again on January 1, 1944, the elder Wood's hopes momentarily rose that the message would report his son was a prisoner of war. The second message, however, permitted only the feeble hope that the "report received from the German government through the International Red Cross" that his son was killed in action was, perhaps, some terrible mistake. The message "killed in action" should be a termination of hopes and the realization that someone is gone forever, but when death happens so far away under unknown circumstances it is not hard to fantasize otherwise.

The end of the war would bring new communications from the army. These dismal messages would concern the discovery of Lieutenant Wood's body, his identification, and queries as to the family's wishes about the disposition of his remains. What, indeed, had happened?



Elbert S. Wood, Jr., as an air cadet in the summer of 1942. All illustrations furnished by the author unless otherwise noted

Elbert Stanley Wood, Jr., was born in Gordon, Nebraska, on March 4, 1921, son of Vera Gladys Hiatt and Elbert Stanley Wood. Young Elbert ("Bert" to his friends, but "Elbert" or "Junior" to his family) was an exemplary student in high school—categorized as "*The Student*" in his 1939 high school yearbook.

A high school buddy, Robert Waterman, remembers that "science and math were almost a part of him. He was intensely curious: thinking, testing,

*Condensed from the book of the same name, published in 1993 by Sarpedon, 166 Fifth Street, New York, New York 10010.

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measuring, reading, talking, and understanding." Social and political sciences also attracted him, and classmate Eugene Bower recalls that he was concerned about the Nazi movement and its seizure of power in Germany when it was hardly known or understood by many people, particularly high school students.²

After high school graduation Wood

was reassigned and sent to the navigation school at San Marcos, Texas.

Graduating as a second lieutenant on June 26, 1943, Wood was furloughed home and then sent to England to serve with the Eighth Air Force as a member of the 306th Bomb Group. He flew five combat missions, one aborted mission, and a final mission that ended just short of the target at Schweinfurt, Germany.

fact that a mass of documents exists even for modest historical events—particularly for military ones. This realization led me, in 1983, to delve into my brother's army record to see what I could recapture of his military career and final combat mission.

Given the immensity of the American effort during World War II, tracing the fortunes of one man seemed impossible. However, the activities of the common soldier during that conflict are better known than one might suspect. The endless paperwork generated by military clerks during World War II is, to an astonishing degree, still preserved. These records provide a "paper trail" that permits reconstruction in remarkable detail of the militarily significant events in the lives of soldiers of the time. The records of the Eighth Air Force, preserved in the National Archives, supplied the framework for his story.³ The narrative was fleshed out by statements of the surviving members of Wood's Flying Fortress crew, and by the testimony of German eyewitnesses to the crash of his aircraft and his funeral in the little community of Michelbach, in Bavaria, Germany. An extraordinarily detailed story eventually emerged although more than forty years had passed since the downing of his aircraft.⁴

I made several trips to Washington, D.C. to visit the National Archives. An unexpected by-product of one of these visits was the discovery of the "293 File," or the Individual Deceased Personnel File. These files were compiled only for servicemen who died or who remained missing in action overseas. These files are now held by the Mortuary Affairs and Casualty Division, U.S. Army Military Personnel Center, Alexandria, Virginia. My brother's 293 file, nearly an inch thick, contained the records of the postwar discovery of his body, his identification, and his eventual return to the United States for permanent burial. Without this record the latter part of this narrative could not have been written.

Additional help came from the brother of another Eighth Air Force ca-



Vera Hiatt Wood and Elbert Stanley Wood, Sr., in 1965. Elbert Wood, born in Missouri, was the Chicago and North Western station agent in Gordon, Nebraska, for many years. He moved to Cody, Nebraska, in 1941, where he worked until retiring in 1950.

attended the University of Missouri and, later, the University of Nebraska. Enlisting in the United States Army on December 8, 1941, he was assigned to the Medical Corps and, in early 1942, Private Wood was giving inoculation shots to inductees at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Longing for a more active role, he volunteered for the Army Air Corps. It was an understandable choice for a young man nurtured for a decade on aerial barnstormers, reinforced by heroic images of the RAF pilots who turned back the *Luftwaffe* in the 1940 Battle of Britain. For whatever reason, his hopes of becoming a pilot were dashed, and he

His air force career lasted almost exactly one year, and his active service ended at the end of a parachute after only thirty days.

Lieutenant Wood was killed in action on the October 14, 1943, mission to destroy the ball bearing factories at Schweinfurt. For years I was satisfied with the unembellished statement provided by the army that he had died during that operation. The telegram simply said, with the terseness born of wartime security, that he was "killed in action on fourteenth October in the European area." It was not until years later that my work raised my consciousness to the

sualty who had spent many years seeking the same type of information I was after. His advice: "Write a letter to the local German newspaper asking for information from eyewitnesses to the destruction of his bomber." The German consulate in Chicago provided me the name of the appropriate newspaper, in Aschaffenburg. My letter asking for help resulted, several weeks later, in a short feature article.

For the next several weeks, letters from Germany appeared regularly in my mailbox from witnesses to the attacks on the Schweinfurt bombers and the crash of my brother's B-17. One was from the daughter of one of the soldiers who had attended his funeral. Correspondence with these people over the next two years led to a full account of the events that took place on the ground as the Schweinfurt air battle swept over northern Bavaria and his B-17 fell out of formation east of Frankfurt.

In October 1988 I accepted invitations by several of my German correspondents to visit the area and see the locale where the bomber crashed, and the locations where the crewmen landed in their parachutes. I first flew to England to visit my brother's former air base at Thurleigh, near Cambridge, north of London. I then flew to Frankfurt, rented a car, and drove east to visit Michelbach. Over the next several days I visited the crash and parachute landing sites, accompanied by eyewitnesses. These visits permitted me to check the accounts by different witnesses and gain confidence in the accuracy of the story I was developing.

Standing before what had been his grave site in the cemetery in Michelbach, I was astonished—and disturbed, if not ashamed—to find I felt no sadness, no sense of loss, no nostalgia. Rather, I was numbed by the realization that my obsessive quest for information was over, and warmed by the knowledge that at last I had laid to rest the uncertainties of my brother's combat experience and death. He was no longer a statistic, an anonymous combatant in a

war that had consumed fifty million lives.

Following World War II, the United States Army made a monumental effort to find the graves or the remains of all U.S. military personnel who fell in battle worldwide, and to place them in military cemeteries overseas. Most Americans who lost family members during the conflict had contact, in one way or another, with the War Graves Registration Command, the unit responsible for this operation. Yet it is difficult today for anyone other than a historian to discover how the remains of these men were found and identified. Many of them lie in overseas cemeteries but, at the request of their families, the remains of more than 171,000 of them were returned after the war to the United States for burial—as were those of 2d Lt. Elbert S. Wood.

Air War Over Germany

The Combined Air Offensive by the British and American airmen, established by the Allied leaders at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, became operational by June, and guaranteed "around the clock" bombing of the

Third Reich on an almost daily basis. The RAF continued to bomb Germany during the night, and the United States Eighth Air Force, later joined by the Fifteenth Air Force, returned to pound other targets during the day. Their goals were to destroy German military, economic, and industrial systems, and undermine the morale of the German people. In the early years of the war, unescorted American daylight bombers suffered staggering losses trying to deprive Germany of these essentials. Until long-range P-51 fighters were available to escort the bombers over enemy territory, the *Luftwaffe* exacted a terrible toll from American bomber fleets.

On August 17, 1943, the Eighth Air Force penetrated the heart of Germany, reaching Schweinfurt and Regensburg.⁵ Schweinfurt was the home of important factories manufacturing ball bearings, essential to mechanized equipment, and Regensburg was the locale for a Messerschmitt factory. Both targets were heavily damaged during the two-pronged raid, but the cost in American men and machines was high: Sixty bombers and six hundred men did not return. Although the two targets were of



The Catholic cemetery in Michelbach. Lieutenant Wood was buried to the right of the white stone cross in the far right background.

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A German fighter pilot's view in a head-on attack against a B-17 squadron over Europe.
Courtesy of Gerald R. Massie

nearly equal importance, this mission became known as "First Schweinfurt."

Over time, the Combined Air Offensive accomplished two major ends. First, the *Luftwaffe* was destroyed as an effective offensive weapon, in part by destroying its planes and pilots in the air, and in part by obliterating the factories and the oil industry that produced and fueled them. The greatest success of strategic bombing, however, was denying Germany the fuel for its war machine—particularly for the *Luftwaffe*, giving Allied forces total control of the skies in the last months of the conflict.

First Missions: Five Milk Runs

The 306th Bomb Group was based near Thurleigh, sixty airline miles northwest of the heart of downtown London. This small rural community consisted then, as now, of a few hundred people. The road to town passes the ruins of an ancient stone windmill, then the white-

washed "Jackal" pub, and several of the thatched cottages that characterize the countryside. The air base lay on an immense plain northwest of town.

The 306th became operational on September 28, 1942, and its first target was a steel works and locomotive and freight car factory at Lille, France. The first attack on German soil, however, did not take place until January 27, 1943, with a raid on Wilhelmshaven. The mission was led by Col. Frank Armstrong of the 306th, the oldest operational group in the Eighth Air Force. The Wilhelmshaven raid led to the proud claim that the 306th, of the American bomb groups in England, was "First Over Germany."⁶

The prospects were dismal for an airman to survive the horrendous losses being suffered at the hands of the *Luftwaffe* at this time. Col. Budd J. Peaslee said, "[In] the months preceding the second mission to Schweinfurt . . .

the future of an individual in the combat crew of a heavy bomber was a prognostic equivalent of a victim of deep seated cancer."⁷ Every group, of course, had its own statistics. The 306th, for instance, lost not a single aircraft on First Schweinfurt, but was to lose ten of the fifteen Fortresses that penetrated German airspace on Second Schweinfurt. Simple arithmetic yielded a 10 percent loss per mission, so with the twenty-five mission limit of the time, the last fifteen missions would be flown on borrowed time.

Elbert S. Wood, Jr., was in the first graduating class of the Army Air Forces Navigation School at San Marcos, Texas, on June 26, 1943. He arrived there for an intensive, twenty-week course in which he spent 782 hours in ground school classes and 104 hours in the air in navigation training. It was rigorous training and, in April, he wrote his sister, "School is about half over now, and is

getting a little easier. From now on there will be more flying and less classroom work. These 14-hour school days are beginning to get pretty old!"

The newly minted lieutenants were sent to stations throughout the world. Lieutenant Wood was to go to the European theater. On his furlough in July, he visited his family in Nebraska. After a brief visit, his orders carried him to New York, where he visited his sister, Marjorie, and took in the sights. Whatever rumors he'd received of his future duty station made him fatalistic about his chances of survival, for he told her, "I won't be coming back."

By August 2 he was in England, where his training continued at a Combat Crew Replacement Center. Three weeks later he was sent to his base at Thurleigh, and assigned to the crew of 1st Lt. George C. Bettinger. Bettinger's new crew needed further training, so they flew locally for the first two weeks of September.

Lieutenant Wood's active combat career began on September 15 with a raid on Romilly. Because the target posed no difficulties for a novice navigator, he was assigned to fly with an experienced pilot, Lt. Emmanuel J. "Manny" Klette. Klette's B-17 Flying Fortress was an F model, Serial Number 42-30199. The plane, built at a cost of \$316,426, rolled off the assembly line in April 1943. Sometime after its arrival in England, the plane was informally christened *Wicked WAAC* (for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps), and a woman's figure, clad in briefs, astride a falling bomb, was painted on the left side of the plane's nose.

Eighteen 306th Fortresses took off on the Romilly mission, crossed the English Channel at 22,000 feet and continued into France, passing east of Paris. A few miles from Romilly a red flare fired from the combat wing leader indicated the Initial Point, and the B-17s turned into the bomb run. Time seemed to drag on the bomb run, for they had to fly through bursts of flak without deviating from their course. The bombardier

peered through the bombsight which, at this time, was controlling the flight of the bomber. The ship trembled as the bombs dropped from the ship and, passing over the target, they turned to return to England. The Fortresses reached the English coast without incident.

Lieutenant Wood flew his remaining missions with his assigned pilot, 1st Lt. George "Brute" Bettinger, in *Wicked WAAC*, with Lt. Abraham Block the copilot. On his second and third missions, the 306th bombed targets at Nantes, France. A fourth mission to Nantes was aborted. There was heavy cloud cover over France, and the force was recalled before they crossed the English Channel. It was disappointing; the excitement and energy expended in an aborted mission was never appreciated, for it did not count as one of the twenty-five missions one had to make to return to the United States—and reassignment to other and less hazardous duty.

Bad weather over Europe during the fall of 1943 made it impossible to bomb in the clear most of the time. For this reason, special radar was developed to permit bombing through the clouds. Although Emden was not an especially strategic target, its coastal location made it an ideal one for air crews to polish their training in action, because water appeared clearly in the radar image. It was also a good target simply because Emden was a German port. Although it was near the German border, the Eighth Air Force could claim it was striking targets within Germany.

On September 27 and again on October 2 *Wicked WAAC* and crew participated in blind bombing missions on Emden, and Lieutenant Wood's fifth and sixth missions were relatively uneventful. Escorting P-47 fighters again accompanied the bombers to the target and managed to keep most of the bombers free from German fighters.

Landing at Thurleigh, Lieutenant Wood scooped his log, charts, and equipment into a duffel bag and explained his notes to the intelligence officer at the debriefing table. Coffee and

a shot of whiskey for the crews followed the interrogation. This raid qualified Wood for the Air Medal. This impressive bronze decoration depicts an eagle diving earthward with two lightning bolts clasped in its talons, suspended by a ribbon of royal blue and gold. The medal was awarded after five combat missions—a decoration that announced the simple fact that one had survived five missions over occupied Europe.

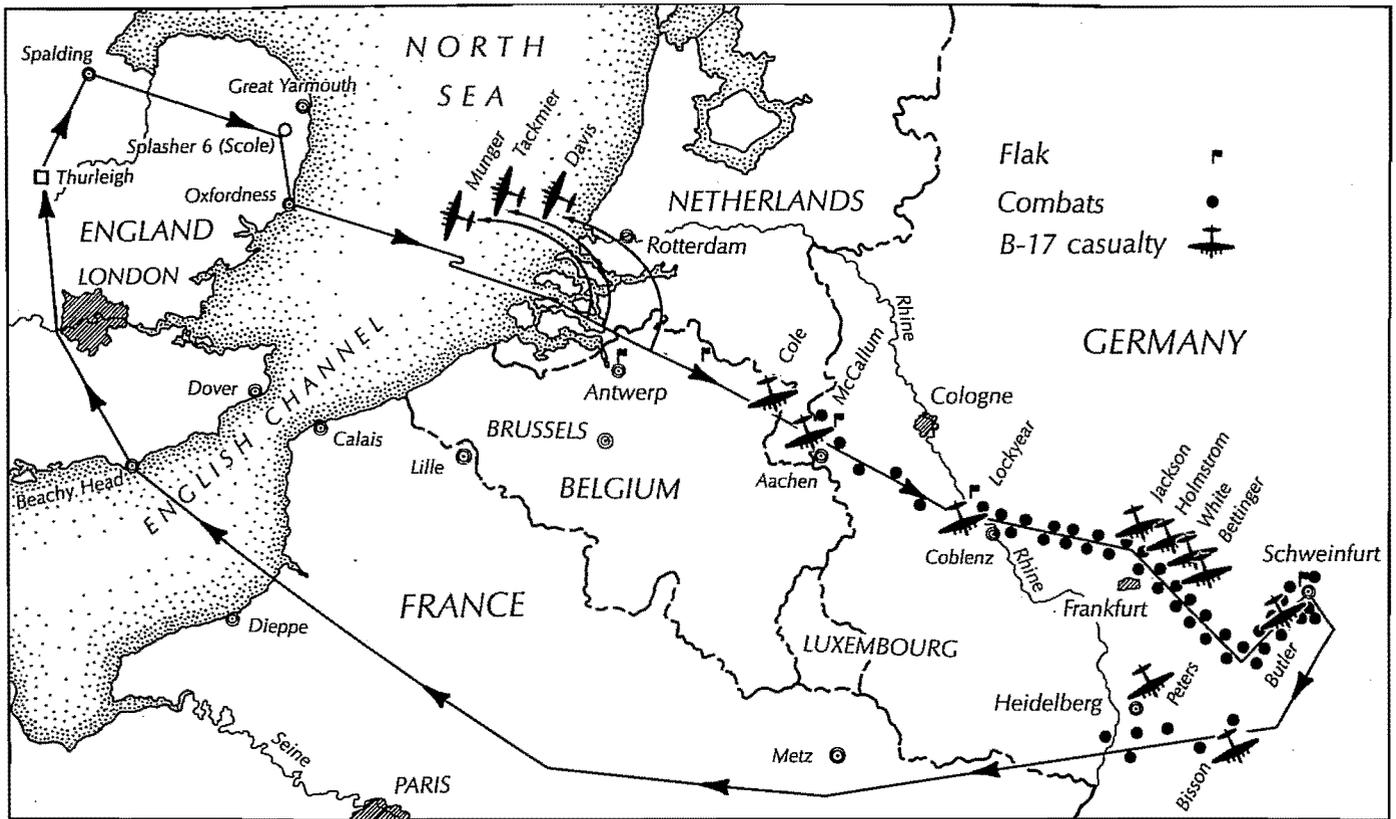
Between October 5 and 12, Lieutenant Wood went to an Eighth Air Force rest home southwest of London. Why he was chosen to go is uncertain, since he'd been on only five easy combat missions, and on a sixth that was aborted. While he was away, three deep penetrations of German airspace had taken place and the Eighth Air Force had suffered badly at the hands of enemy fighters. October 13 was to be Lieutenant Wood's last "free" day before becoming a participant in one of the most memorable air battles of all time.

Second Schweinfurt

The Second Schweinfurt raid on October 14 was a mission so bitterly fought and ending with such devastating losses to the attacking force that the engagement has become known as "Black Thursday." Although there were other Allied missions over Europe using greater numbers of aircraft, and sustaining greater losses, this engagement is generally acknowledged as the most savagely fought air battle in history.⁸ The task of the mission was to eliminate one of the major sources of ball bearings, essential to German war industry. Forty-two percent of these bearings were made in Schweinfurt. A successful mission clearly would have shortened the war. This was a heady incentive, indeed, for the men of the Eighth Air Force. "An ordinary young man is not often told that what he and a few others may do between breakfast and dinner will change the course of world history."⁹

It was a big operation. The First Air Division, to consist of Fortresses, was to lead the mission, which was to reach

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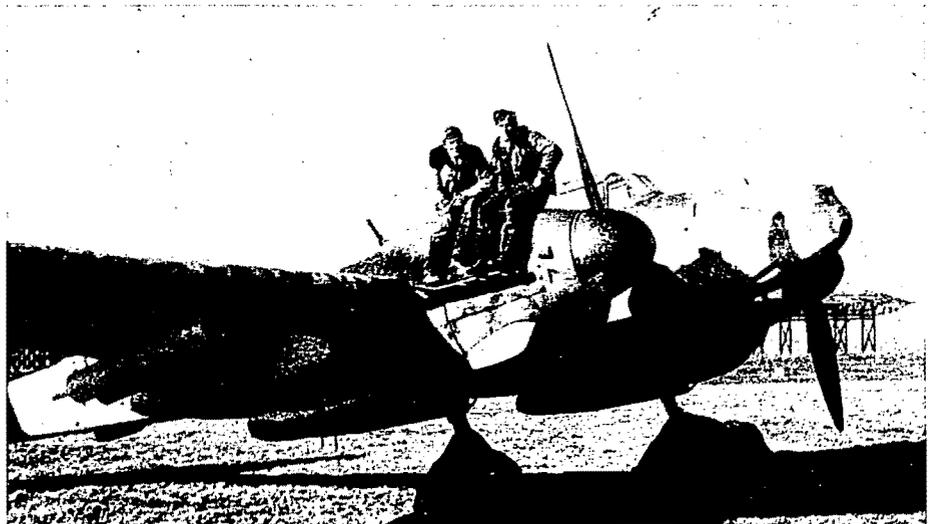


Route of the First Air Division and of the 306th Bomb Group on Second Schweinfurt.

the continent ten minutes before the Third Division. The Second Division, with sixty B-24 Liberators, was to reach the target after the Third Division.

Crews were briefed at 7:00 A.M., and a few hours later a British reconnaissance plane radioed home, "All of central Germany is in the clear." The weather in England, however, was terrible, and a heavy fog lay on the land. The call to "Board up!" came nevertheless, and men clambered into the planes. Takeoff was scheduled to begin at 10:15. Visibility was down to one-fourth of a mile and the Fortresses took off at one-minute intervals on full instruments. At 6,500 feet the formations broke into bright sunlight above the clouds. It took two hours to assemble the wing.

The First Division was commanded by Col. Budd J. Peaslee, who flew with the 92nd Bomb Group's operations of-



A twin-engine Messerschmitt Bf-110 in 1943 or 1944, armed with eight-inch rocket launchers of the sort that downed *Wicked WAAC*. Herbert Kist and his radio operator, who participated in Second Schweinfurt, are perched on their aircraft. Courtesy of Herbert Kist

ficer. He was to lead the 383 bombers assembling over England. The Second Division, made up of B-24 Liberators, encountered so much difficulty in assembling that it was forced to cancel its participation in the mission, and twenty-four of its planes were diverted to a secondary target off the coast of Holland.

Save for the B-24s, the raid began auspiciously. The eighteen 306th aircraft were led by Captain Schoolfield, an experienced pilot. The Fortresses reached the North Sea and left the English coast at 12:30. German fighter units by now were on alert, and soon fighters along the coast from Antwerp to Calais took off to intercept them. They were aloft waiting for the bombers when the first Fortresses entered the continent about 1:00 P.M.

Fifty P-47 Thunderbolt fighter escorts met the bombers over the North Sea and accompanied them to the limit of the fighters' range, near the German border at Aachen. The American fighter defense did not prevent two B-17s from falling in flames on Belgium as the Thunderbolts, low on fuel, turned back and left for England at 1:33. They had done what they could.

"We had no trouble until the P-47's left," Schoolfield later recounted.

Then all hell broke loose. Between the Rhine and the target our formations were attacked by at least three hundred enemy aircraft. Rockets mounted under the wings of enemy aircraft fired into our tight defensive formation caused the highest rate of casualties. The crews described the scene as similar to a parachute invasion, there were so many crews bailing out.¹⁰

The First Division came under attack by perhaps 250 to 300 German fighters, principally Focke-Wulf 190s and Messerschmitt Bf-109s, in one continuous air battle across central Germany. Messerschmitt Bf-110 Destroyers joined them, but they kept beyond the range of the bombers' machine guns and fired rockets into the formations.

Seven 306th planes nevertheless reached Schweinfurt and released their bombs. As the fliers left the target, they could see billows of black smoke rising

over Schweinfurt. As rewarding as the sight might have been to the embattled men, it was canceled by the view out their right windows: As far as they could see were dozens of columns of black, turgid smoke blooming upward from the pyres of downed B-17s. The 306th lost two more planes after the attack, but the remaining five 306th bombers returned to England, although one crashed on landing and the other four suffered varying degrees of battle damage. The net loss or damage to the group: one hundred percent. Altogether, sixty American bombers were shot down and their crews lost; another five were abandoned or crash landed when they returned to England; and others were so badly damaged they were suitable only for salvage.

But the loss suffered on Black Thursday went much deeper than the loss of the bombers and their crews—air superiority was temporarily lost to the *Luftwaffe*, and it was the death of unescorted daylight bombing over Germany. German newspapers properly claimed the battle a *Luftwaffe* victory. The Americans would not return to bomb central Germany until the new P-51 Mustang fighter was available to accompany and protect them—as they would begin doing within a month and a half.

Last Mission of the Wicked WAAC

Second Schweinfurt was Bettinger's eighteenth mission. Abraham Block, from Chicago, was the copilot. Wood, Donald E. Williams, and Linden K. Voight were the only regular crewmen that day. Alternates filled the remaining positions.

Second Lt. Leland A. Dowden was assigned to be bombardier: It was his second mission. Sgt. Samuel Gerking, a native of Oregon, was the top turret gunner: Second Schweinfurt was his first and last mission. Sgt. Gordon F. Lewis was the radioman, and Sgt. James F. Montana was the right waist gunner: Second Schweinfurt was his sixteenth mission. The left waist gunner, Sgt.

Donald E. Williams, was a twenty-two-year-old from Illinois who was part Comanche Indian.

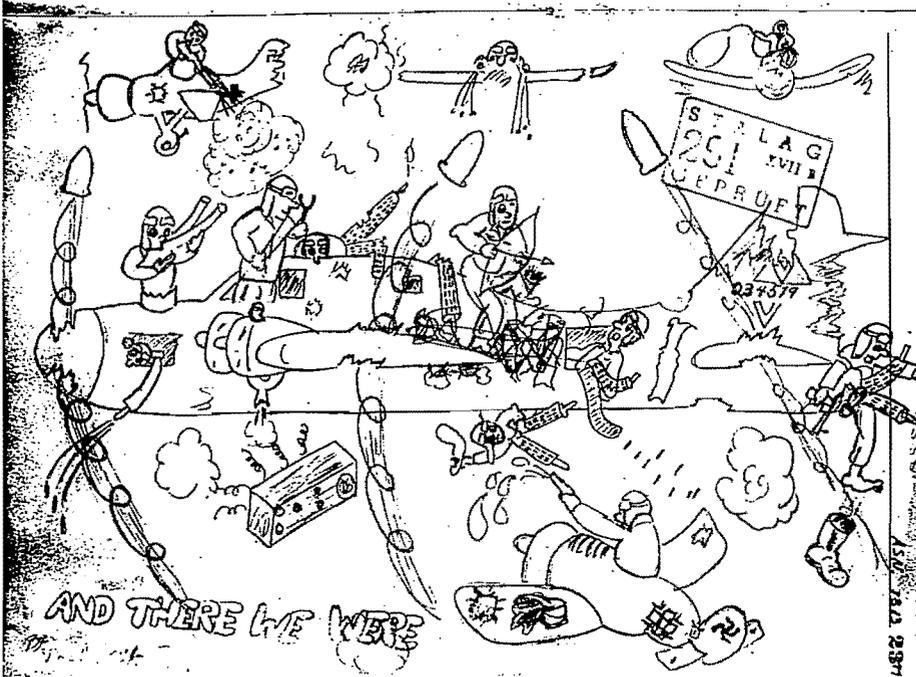
The ball turret gunner was Sgt. Elmer W. "Pete" Mills, on his twenty-fifth mission. He volunteered for the October 14 mission before he knew what the target was to be. Although he desperately wanted to back out when he learned of their destination, he couldn't: "My pride just wouldn't let me." Mills had no illusions about the difficulties they faced. Sgt. Linden K. Voight, thirty-five years old, was the tail gunner and the "old man" on the crew, being ten years older than the rest of the men.

Wicked WAAC and its crew lifted off at 10:24. They climbed through the clouds to join their formation without difficulty. All the 306th Fortresses remained in tight formation until they entered the continent. Shortly after crossing into Holland, however, supercharger malfunctions forced two planes to turn back for England. A few minutes later, as they passed into Belgian airspace, another B-17 turned back toward the North Sea. Fifteen minutes later, one of their Fortresses intercepted a rocket and became the first 306th plane to be shot down. It crashed in eastern Belgium. Another plane went down on the outskirts of Aachen. The remaining thirteen 306th planes pulled together to close up the gaps in their formation as they approached Aachen.

One of the pilots of the twin-engined Messerschmitt Bf-210 "Destroyers" was *Oberleutnant* (1st Lt.) Herbert Schob. He was a *Luftwaffe* ace with a long and successful combat record, having registered more than ten aerial kills. He had first flown in Spain for Germany's Condor Legion, Hitler's contribution to General Franco's revolutionary forces in the Spanish Civil War.

Three months after his return from Spain Schob claimed a victory on the first day of the German invasion of Poland. In the Scandinavian campaign, he shot down a British Royal Navy dive bomber. He later served in the campaign in Greece, then was transferred to

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"And There We Were." The fictitious destruction of *Wicked WAAC* as sketched by George W. Soell in the prisoner of war book kept by waist gunner Donald E. Williams at Stalag 17. Courtesy of Donald E. Williams

the Russian front, where he claimed his tenth aerial victory. By the fall of 1943 he was back in Germany, flying a Messerschmitt Bf-110.¹¹

Oberleutnant Schob, with the remainder of his group, scrambled from the alert hut at 1:00 P.M. By the time he was airborne the first elements of the American bomber stream were approaching the German border. Streaking westward, Schob passed high over the south part of the Spessart—a hilly, wooded area of Germany resembling the Ozarks of southern Missouri. North of Frankfurt, Schob's group spotted the B-17s and began their attack. Ten minutes later Schob registered a victory. Pulling up the nose of his plane, he launched his rockets into the bomber stream. He claimed a Flying Fortress at 2:10, somewhere east of Frankfurt, making it possible—despite the confusion that afternoon—that he was the pilot responsible for downing *Wicked WAAC* or one of its sister ships.¹²

This was Wood's first close encoun-

ter with enemy aircraft. On his previous combat missions, the weather and friendly fighter escorts had kept the German fighters well away from *Wicked WAAC*, but October 14 was a deadly initiation into the fraternity of air combat. There were simply too many enemy aircraft to count. The Fortress shuddered with the recoil of .50-caliber machine guns, firing from all positions. Over the Rhine River, three 306th B-17s were shot down. One of them, flying just behind *Wicked WAAC*, fell flaming to the ground. North and east of Frankfurt three more B-17s of the group were shot down within little more than five minutes.

Wicked WAAC had already suffered damage, but the first crippling blow came when a rocket burst destroyed much of the vertical stabilizer. The Fortress was also so badly damaged by cannon shells from incoming fighters that, as waist gunner Donald Williams said, "You could have fallen out of some of the holes in the plane."

Another attack damaged the engine

to the right of the cockpit and it became a runaway, streaming a trail of smoke. It threatened to tear the engine from the wing, so it was feathered. Airspeed was reduced with the loss of the engine, and *Wicked WAAC* began to drop back in formation. Stragglers were easy victims for German fighters, and the pilot shoved the throttles of the remaining engines to full acceleration in an effort to catch up with the rest of the group.

Shortly after passing Frankfurt, Lieutenant Wood was struck in the stomach by shrapnel. He fell to the floor behind the bombardier. Dowden crawled back to him and opened his chest parachute harness and his clothing. He gave Wood what help was possible from the first aid kit. The bombardier replaced Wood's parachute harness and locked it in position. He turned back to his guns while Wood reattached the parachute. A moment later Wood tapped the bombardier on the back and touched his parachute, and Dowden helped him to the forward emergency exit in the floor of their compartment, released it, and clamped Wood's hand around the parachute release ring. They exchanged a few words, then Dowden pushed him out of the escape hatch head first. Someone in the back of the plane said his chute opened.

Wicked WAAC was beginning to catch up with the planes ahead when a rocket struck the left wing and set the wing tip fuel tanks and the engine on fire. Bettinger immediately dived to the left and dropped out of formation to avoid blowing up other Fortresses if his aircraft exploded. He also applied fire extinguishers and put the plane in a steep dive, a strategy sometimes successful in efforts to blow out such fires.

About this time Dowden, the bombardier, was struck in the left leg by cannon shrapnel. By now it was clear that *Wicked WAAC* would not reach the target, so he tried to release the bombs. When this didn't work, he called the engineer and told him to salvo the bombs from the bomb bay. When the bombs fell, Dowden destroyed the bombsight

with his .45-caliber automatic, and parachuted from the plane.¹³

Michelbach is a small community about twenty miles east of Frankfurt, one of the many small towns sprinkled across the rolling hills in northwestern Bavaria. The town lay on the bank of the Kahl River, a small tributary of the Main River. There was no industry in or near Michelbach to invite a direct air strike, and its inhabitants had little reason to fear the formations of Fortresses and Liberators.

Cities in western Germany were, however, being repeatedly attacked, and Frankfurt had been the target of a round-the-clock air raid on October 4 and 5. In July 1943 Hamburg had been leveled by a firestorm created by the thousands of incendiary bombs dropped into the wreckage left by high explosive bombs. News of its demolition and cremation spread to even the most remote parts of rural Germany, fanning the hatred that was building among the people for the Allied airmen they called *terrorflieger*.¹⁴

At Kälberau, a small community west of Michelbach, townspeople heard the distant drone of the First Air Division as it approached. People crowded the streets to watch and, as the sound grew, the individual bombers became visible as small dots against the sky. Otto Staab saw one of them catch fire directly overhead. It banked to the north and began a steep dive, parachutes streaming from it as it disappeared over the horizon.

The *Luftwaffe* air base at Langendiebach, eight miles northwest of Michelbach, had been on alert since the bomber stream was detected approaching the continent. The alert included mobilizing teams of men in trucks and touring cars to search for and capture airmen from downed planes. By 2:15 they could already see the trails of smoke from disabled B-17s to the north and east, and vehicles began moving toward points on the horizon where smoke trails and parachutes were visible.



Wicked WAAC, now devoid of its crew, skips across a plowed field before crashing into a tree-lined road and exploding. The town of Geiselbach is in the background. From a watercolor by James C. Fisher



Lieutenant Wood's landing site on the bank of the Kahl River. Father Walter Zimowski and fourteen-year-old Alfred Sticker watched his descent from the church in Kälberau.

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Lieutenant Wood had already left the aircraft when the pilot ordered the rest of the crew to bail out, but by this time the intercom and the bell signaling such an order was shot out, and the message did not reach the crew members. The pilot trimmed the plane so it was flying nearly level, set the auto-pilot, attached his parachute to his harness, and dropped through the bomb bay. Block was badly hurt before he left the co-pilot's seat, and he broke his collar bone as he dived out of the bomb bay.

Fortunately, considering his broken leg, Dowden's parachute dropped into a tree south of Kälberau. He was taken into town and placed in a barn. Later that evening he was carried out of the barn and placed in a large truck. Several airmen were in it, and Wood's body, his parachute wrapped around him, lay next to Dowden on the drive to Michelbach, where the navigator's body was left on the sidewalk of the main street. The truck drove on to take the injured men to a hospital.

The plane flew in a semicircle during its descent. Erich Henkel of Geiselbach said that "folks ran like rabbits" as it circled over Omersbach and Geiselbach, since people had no idea where it would crash. It touched down in the broad valley southeast of Geiselbach and skipped across an open field. The propellers churned the soil in the field as they dug into the earth and were bent back flush with the engine cowlings. The bomber headed directly toward the road between Omersbach and Geiselbach, a shaded lane lined by trees.

The mission ended abruptly when *Wicked WAAC* smashed into the trees. The wings disintegrated as the plane rammed into their trunks, and when the fuel tanks ruptured the gasoline exploded in a ball of white flame. Finger-like plumes of flame erupted from the fireball and catapulted forward in gentle arcs. The burning fuselage and engines plunged through the trees as the bomber was torn apart. The fireball quickly expanded into a tower of black, roiling

smoke that rose in a widening cone.

The explosion was witnessed by several farmers and their families who were working their fields. Heinrich Rienecker, a farmer who lived in Geiselbach, was plowing near the road using two cows. He and his son watched the plane's descent. Transfixed by the event, or uncertain where to move to avoid it, Rienecker was only a few yards distant when the plane exploded. He died instantly of a brain concussion and other injuries. Both cows also perished.

Young Thekla Peter and a French work prisoner had just arrived in the field and were working only a few yards from Rienecker. The explosion blew Peter flat on her face. Burning gasoline splashed on her back, and she rolled in the grass along the road to put out the flames, but they were not extinguished until one of the farmers wrapped her in a blanket taken from one of the dead cows. In shock, she was taken home in her cart. "I looked," she said, "like a smoked ham." The local doctor had no medication for her burns, but was able to give her morphine. The family boiled oil, butter, and beeswax to make a balm for the burns. She still carries terrible scars from the event.

The ten-man crew of *Wicked WAAC* landed at widely scattered locations. Most of them floated above the valley of the Kahl River and past the vineyards on the hills east of Michelbach, then over the town itself, to touch down in open country. They were soon captured and sent to German prisoner of war camps. Only the engineer, Gerking, escaped without a scratch. Everyone else was wounded, but only the navigator did not survive the day. Wood's parachute opened much higher than those of the others, since he was the first of the crew to leave the plane, at an altitude of about 23,600 feet.

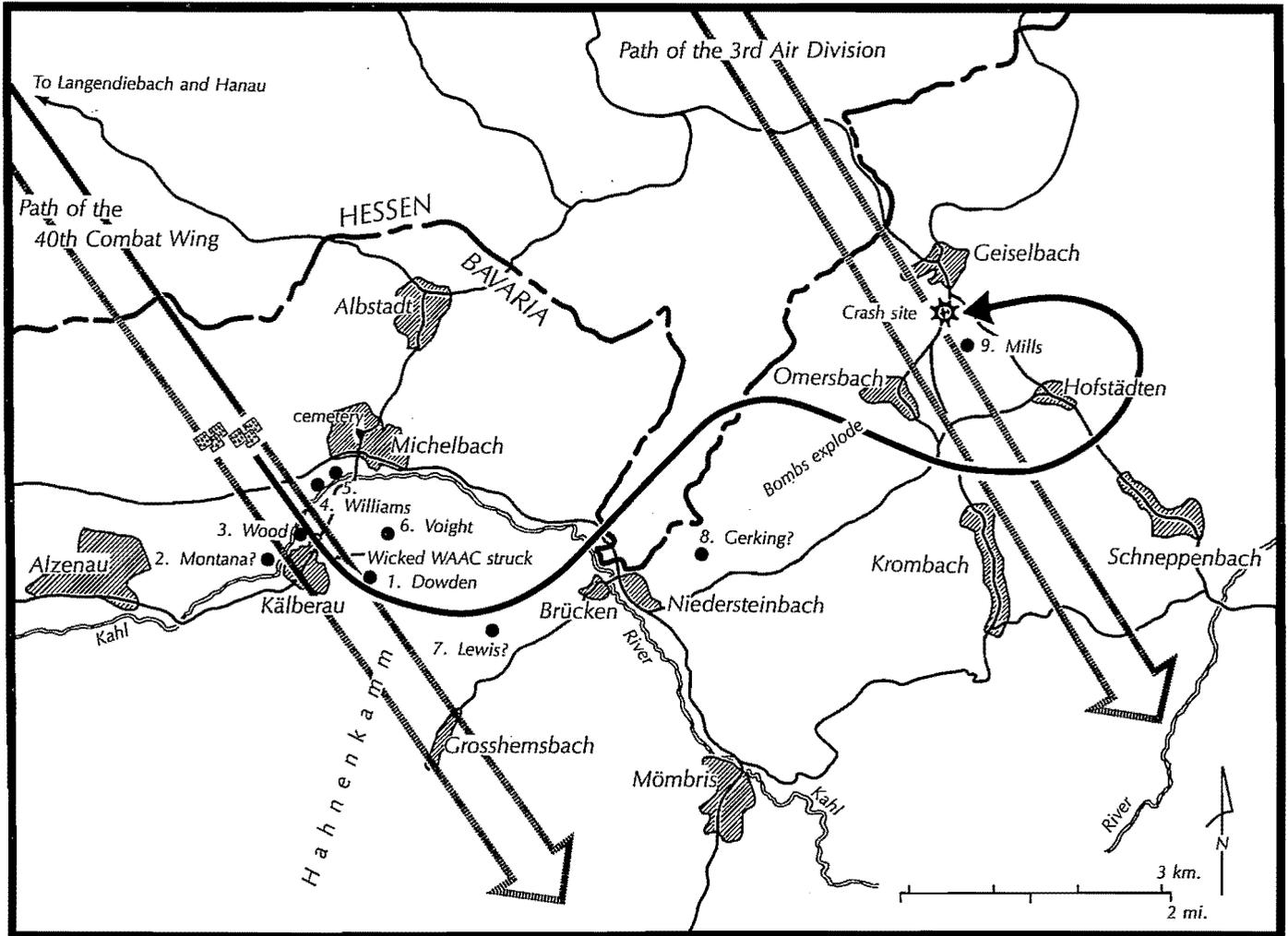
Witnesses on the ground say Wood's parachute descended more quickly than those of the others, and that it was swinging wildly from side to side. He struck the ground a few yards from the

bank of the Kahl River, midway between the towns of Michelbach and Kälberau. Fourteen-year-old Alfred Sticker was near the church in Kälberau and, with Father Walter Zimowski, the assistant priest, they watched the men parachute from the stricken bomber.

"One of the parachutes was swinging back and forth in the air, and fell head first for part of the jump," Sticker wrote. Sticker and Zimowski ran down the hill and across the railroad tracks when the parachute touched down just east of the church. They unbuttoned the airman's jacket, saw that his entire face was blue, and noticed his pulse was "very slow." Zimowski spoke to the flier in several different languages, but the airman did not respond.¹⁵

People from Kälberau were beginning to arrive, and soon a large crowd surrounded the flier. Sticker and other witnesses said the flier's oxygen mask was not properly attached, but others believed his asphyxiation was because of his parachute cords, some of which were wrapped around his neck. If his oxygen mask was not properly attached, he may have rapidly lost consciousness in the thin air above 10,000 feet. If so, there is good reason to believe his death was painless. Despite attempts to resuscitate him, Sticker said that "the young American flier was beyond rescue." One of the men in the crowd that assembled in the field that afternoon took a photograph of the young airman as he lay in the field.

Bomber crews were landing at widely separated places across central Germany. Some of the men were taken prisoner without incident; some were abused by civilians; and still others fared even worse. A Fortress of another group returning from Schweinfurt made a forced landing twenty-four miles east of the crash site of *Wicked WAAC*. The Gestapo took four of the crew into custody and shot them a few minutes later. When United States troops arrived in April 1945 they were told of the execution and in 1946, an American military court reviewed the murder of the air-



Route of the two bomber streams on their way to Schweinfurt. The path of *Wicked WAAC*, its crash site, and the parachute landing sites of nine of her crew are based on German eyewitness accounts.

men. The leader of the execution squad was sentenced to death and hanged.¹⁶

Soldiers came later that day, cordoned off the wreckage of *Wicked WAAC*, and placed a guard on it to prevent pilfering. A few days later, local farmers helped collect the debris. The older school children in Geiselbach were assigned to pick up the .50-caliber ammunition that was scattered around the crash site. The debris from the Fortress was carried away by trucks. The final destination of the bomber was a salvage yard, where the last recognizable parts of *Wicked WAAC* were reduced to

ingots and recycled to become part of the arsenal of the *Luftwaffe*.¹⁷

A Funeral in Germany

Andreas Noll had been the *bürgermeister* of Michelbach since 1912. Sometime before World War I he'd come to Michelbach and opened a bakery, and became the *bürgermeister* a little later. Although it was customary for the *bürgermeister* to be a member of the Nazi Party during the Third Reich, Noll remained in office throughout World War II despite his lack of party membership.

Because there was no morgue in Michelbach, Lieutenant Wood's body was laid out in the fire station. Noll contacted the *Luftwaffe* and asked them to evacuate the navigator's body, but he was told the remains should be taken care of by local authorities. The day after Second Schweinfurt, a medical corpsman from the *Luftwaffe* appeared at the city hall to interview Noll. He and Noll examined the body and removed Wood's identification tags. One tag was sent to Berlin, and the other to the International Red Cross. When Noll asked the corpsman what to do with the body,

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he was told, "That's your business." Noll therefore ordered a local carpenter to build a wood coffin and make a wood cross for the airman (on which the middle initial was wrongly shown as Elbert C. Wood).

Although he had never been a soldier, Noll felt that a military casualty should be buried with military honors, so he ordered all German soldiers who were home on furlough in Michelbach to attend the funeral. Seven members of the *Wehrmacht* appeared in uniform on Sunday, October 17, including Peter Hofmann. Other witnesses included the Hitler Youth leader in Michelbach, a representative of the *Wehrmacht*, and several civilians and children. The group carried the coffin up the cobblestone street to the Catholic cemetery on the north side of Michelbach. The grave had been dug before the small procession arrived.

Andreas Noll and Karl Hermann, the cemetery caretaker, performed the burial at the cemetery, which had a "serious and official" character. Noll made a speech in which he pointed out that the airman had fought and died for his country and that the soldiers were present in his honor. He also commented that the soldiers at the funeral might be "confronted with the same fate." The soldiers saluted while the coffin was covered with earth.

Bürgermeister Noll jeopardized himself by his handling of Lieutenant Wood's funeral, for local Nazis believed he'd been "too considerate" of an enemy of the Reich. The grave was, however, well tended by local citizens. Peter Hofmann's wife, Elisabeth, often decorated the grave of the "handsome young American" when she visited the adjoining one of her father.

In March 1945 Allied armies stormed across the Rhine, and Allied troops stood poised to invade central Germany. American troops quickly captured Alzenau and then directed their attention toward Michelbach. The 106th Cavalry Group began their drive up the Kahl valley on March 30—Good Friday.



Andreas Noll (1876-1970), *bürgermeister* of Michelbach, 1912-45. He solemnly conducted Lieutenant Wood's funeral two days after the raid. Courtesy of Rudi Kress

Michelbach was bombarded by assault guns about 10:30; the barrage devastated the railroad station and yards and damaged many nearby houses. The town was captured after a brief but bitter battle. The American troops continued up the Kahl valley, and the sound of fighting soon passed beyond earshot.¹⁸

A few days later, American officers arrived in Alzenau to establish a local headquarters of the Office of Military Government. In 1945 they dismissed Andreas Noll from his post as *bürgermeister*. He had been seen in a photograph with some uniformed local Nazis, so he was considered by the Americans to be politically unreliable. Noll had also been as high-handed with officials of the new military government as he earlier had been with his own. His long reign as *bürgermeister* of Michelbach ended, but he is still remembered by residents as having remained in that position longer than any other municipal office holder. He should also be remembered as a humane official who went out of his way to bury an American airman with dignity and honor.

Homecoming

For nearly a century, Americans have been committed to the recovery, identification, and proper burial of the war dead, but only with the experience gained through involvement in several conflicts was it possible to accomplish in practice what had been supported in theory. During World War I the War Department directed the military to keep mortuary records and to mark soldiers' graves with registered headboards. After the return of World War I dead to the United States for reburial only 3.5 percent of the more than 79,000 American fatalities in that conflict remained unidentified.

In World War II, Graves Registration Service (GRS) units of the Quartermaster Corps were charged with coordinating the collection, identification, and burial of the dead. They made every effort to establish the identity of the de-

ceased by consulting members of their units. This accomplished, the bodies were transferred to one of the temporary interment sites in Europe. At the close of hostilities in Europe 117,000 U.S. casualties were interred in fifty-four cemeteries.

After V-E day the GRS was replaced by the American Graves Registration Command (AGRC).¹⁹ This organization, established in July 1945, no longer collected and removed bodies from the battlefield. Instead, the AGRC concentrated its energies on the recovery of isolated and unrecorded burials and unburied remains.

In 1945 the AGRC was assigned to carry out the postwar Casualty Clearance Plan. The plan was designed to confirm or alter the casualty status (Presumed Dead, Missing in Action, Missing, Prisoner of War, or Captured) provisionally assigned during the war to thousands of American soldiers. Because the families of these men anxiously awaited word on the status of their soldier kin, casualty clearance was given high priority.

The search and recovery mission was accomplished by a series of area sweeps, each of which was carried out in three phases. In the first phase a three-man team systematically visited communities in a given area, distributing posters describing the operation and urging local people to volunteer any information they might have regarding burials of American dead.

The data-gathering phase was followed by the investigative phase, when a special team followed every lead concerning the whereabouts of grave sites. The investigating team contacted community leaders and other residents reported to have information on burial places. They were obliged to continue their investigations until they had inquired into every rumor and bit of gossip about the disposition of American remains.

The final phase was accomplished by the disinterring team. This team went to the grave site and exhumed the re-

mains, which were removed to cemeteries in France, Belgium, The Netherlands, or Luxembourg. No war dead were to be permanently buried in countries with which America had been at war.

Under the "Return of the Dead Program," more commonly known as "repatriation," next of kin were given the option of having the remains interred in a permanent United States military cemetery overseas, or having them returned to the United States for burial in a national or private cemetery.

The AGRC sought expert advice to help identify unknown remains, including that from detectives and from specialists in physical anthropology. Early in 1946 Dr. Harry L. Shapiro, curator of physical anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, was asked by the quartermaster general in Washington, D.C., if he could be of help in the identification of the war dead. He assured the quartermaster general that "current knowledge of skeletal variation and its correlations with age, sex and race would be helpful."²⁰

Techniques recommended by Shapiro were put into practice at the Central Identification Point (CIP) in Strasbourg, France. From August 1946 until the spring of 1947, all recovered remains were first sent directly to the CIP for examination. A second CIP was later established at Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium.

Processing of remains was a complex task done by a team of technicians using a variety of specialized techniques. The men possessed a variety of skills: They knew how to reconstruct the skeleton, make an accurate dental chart, and take fingerprints under difficult conditions.

After compiling their files the body was interred in one of the American cemeteries in Europe. The information was then forwarded to headquarters, AGRC, for assessment and identification. Of more than 148,000 remains recovered in the European Theater, only about one percent were still unidentified at the close of the program in 1951,

evidence of the skill and persistence of the CIP technicians.

In time, the remains of more than 171,000 of those who died overseas during World War II were returned to American soil. Although there was debate about the pros and cons of the Return of the Dead program, next of kin of more than half the recovered dead preferred they be returned to the United States for burial.

On the morning of March 13, 1947, Maj. Gustave H. Weimann, of the 466th Quartermaster Battalion, American Graves Registration Command (AGRC), United States Army, received a telephone call from the British Missing Research and Enquiry Service (MRES) at Butzbach.²¹ The MRES was an RAF organization dedicated to the recovery of RAF personnel who had died in the air war over Europe and the Far East.

The MRES and the AGRC cooperated in their search for missing personnel and, when the MRES found American casualties, the information was transmitted to the nearest AGRC field unit. When the MRES unit at Butzbach telephoned to notify the AGRC of its discovery of an American casualty, the incoming message was recorded and filed by Major Weimann: "American aircraft crashed 14 October 1943—at 16:00 hours—attack on Schweinfurt—1 American buried [at] Michelbach—Kreis Alzenau L 51/M-96." The grave, that of 2d Lt. Elbert S. Wood, Jr., had been missed in earlier searches for American war dead in Germany.

On the afternoon of the same day, Major Weimann sent Gaston Wolf (War Dead Civilian Investigator) to investigate the case of the American flier buried at Michelbach. Wolf's first visit was to the *bürgermeister* of Michelbach, Oskar Grunzfelder, who had assumed office after Andreas Noll's dismissal. Grunzfelder took Wolf for the short walk from the city hall to Lieutenant Wood's grave. The disinterring team, under the direction of Wolf's assistant, Pfc. Peter N. Zervos, with the help of four German laborers, began opening the grave.

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That evening Wolf interviewed Andreas Noll and obtained his version of Wood's death and burial. The disintering team reached the coffin the next morning. No dog tags were found, since it was customary for the Germans to remove all such effects. The body was fully clothed save for footwear. Lieutenant Wood's A-6 fleece-lined flight boots had been removed and, until they were given to me in 1991, remained in the possession of the man who dug his grave in 1943.

The remains were placed in a burial box together with the wood cross, and sent to the CIP at Neuville-en-Condroz. There were two discrepancies in his identification that called for investigation at Neuville. Not only were there inconsistencies in his middle initial, but the number "7934" marked on some of the clothing did not agree with Wood's army serial number. For this reason the remains were classified as "Unknown X-5423."

An "Identification Check List" noted the remains were clothed in an officers' pink shirt and green trousers, tie, yellow web belt, cotton socks, jockey shorts, and size 40 gabardine flying coveralls. Leather bars denoting the rank of second lieutenant were on the coverall shoulders and the name "E.S. Wood" was printed on the left chest. There were no shoes. A careful comparison also was made of the tooth charts prepared for X-5423 and Wood's dental records made in June of 1943. The two records corresponded in all essential particulars.

Laboratory examination began to help resolve the discrepancy between the name and the numbers written on the clothing. The chemical laboratory results were reported on May 9, 1947. A technician found the numeral "7934" stenciled eight times on the waist band of the pair of jockey-type cotton shorts worn by X-5423. This number, found on two other items of clothing, corresponded to the last four digits of Wood's enlisted serial number (but not to the new serial number assigned him when

CONFIDENTIAL

SECRET
 AUTH: CR 5160
 DATE: 10/14/43
 INITIALS:

Classification changed to **RESTRICTED** by E. A. BRADNAR, Lt. Col., AG
 by F. M. MURKIN, Capt., AG
 Date: MAR 1 1946

WAR DEPARTMENT
 HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES
 WASHINGTON

Classification changed to: **CONFIDENTIAL**
 Auth: *[Signature]*
 Date: 1 Oct 43

821

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

- ORGANIZATION: Location AAF Station 111; Command or Air Force 8th
 Group 306th Bomb Gr (H); Squadron 369th Bomb Sq
- SPECIFY: Point of Departure Wormleigh, England; Course as Prescribed
 Intended Destination Schneifurt, England; Type of Mission H. Bomb
- WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
- GIVE: (a) Date 14/10/43; Time Unknown, and Location Unknown
 of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
 (b) Specify whether () Last Sighted; () Last contacted by Radio;
 () Forced Down; () Seen to Crash; or (x) Information not Available.
- AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check only one (x) Enemy Aircraft; () Enemy Anti-Aircraft; () Other Circumstances as follows
- AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-17; A.A.F. Serial Number 42-30199
- ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R 1820-97 A.A.F. Serial Number (a) 43-57862
 (b) 43-58007; (c) 43-58110; (d) 43-57743
- INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)
 (a) P-383036; (b) P-383250; (c) P-382985; (d) KN-145422
 (e) P-383450; (f) P-383395; (g) P-383228; (h) S-119917
- THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty X
- NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers 0; Total 10
 (Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars; if more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to this form).

Crew Position	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number
EUS1. Pilot	Bettinger, George G.	1st Lt.	0-733592
EUS2. Co-Pilot	Blook, Abraham	2nd Lt.	0-736086
KIA 3. Navigator	Wood, Albert S. Jr.	2nd Lt.	0-683366
PTD 4. Bombardier	Dowden, Leland A.	2nd Lt.	0-676577
EUS 5. Top Turret Gunner	Corking, Samuel F.	S/Sgt.	39303948
EUS 6. Radio Operator	Lewis, Gordon F.	S/Sgt.	39828747
EUS 7. Ball Turret Gunner	Mills, Elmer W.	T/Sgt.	32399676
EUS 8. Right Waist Gunner	Montana, James F.	S/Sgt.	36349974
EUS 9. Left Waist Gunner	Williams, Donald R.	S/Sgt.	17034562
EUS10. Tail Gunner	Voight, Linden K.	S/Sgt.	37372321

11. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LOST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME.

Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number	Contacted				Saw	
			By Radio	Last Sighted	Saw Crash	Forced Landing		
1. None								
2. _____								
3. _____								

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, ANSWER YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used; (b) Persons were seen walking away from scene of crash; or (c) Any other reason (Specify) Unknown

13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN.

14. ATTACH EVIDENCE DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT.

15. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE HERE None

Date of Report 15 October 1943.

(Signature of Preparing Officer)
PAUL J. BAILLIE, 1st Lt., Air Corps,
 Asst. Adjutant, 306th Bomb Gr (H).

A Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) was filed for each American aircraft missing in action. MACR No. 821 records the then-unknown fate of *Wicked WAAC*. National Archives and Records Administration

Navigator's Death

Flame: A Navigator's Death Over Schweinfurt (New York: Sarpedon, 1993).

⁵ Martin Middlebrook, *The Schweinfurt-Regensburg Mission* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983).

⁶ There are two unit histories for the 306th Bomb Group: Arthur P. Bove, *First Over Germany: 306th Bombardment Group in World War II* (San Angelo, Tex.: Newsfoto Publishing Co., 1946); and Russell A. Strong, *First Over Germany: A History of the 306th Bombardment Group* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Hunter Publishing, 1982). Because it was the oldest operational Eighth Air Force unit in England, it is mentioned prominently in virtually every general history.

⁷ Budd J. Peaslee, *Heritage of Valor: The Eighth Air Force in World War II* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), 151.

⁸ The Schweinfurt missions have attracted the attention of numerous scholars. Prominent general accounts include Thomas M. Coffey, *Decision Over Schweinfurt* (New York: David McKay, 1977); Middlebrook, *Schweinfurt-Regensburg*; and John Sweetman, *Schweinfurt: Disaster in the Skies* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

⁹ Elmer Bendiner, *The Fall of Fortresses* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 9.

¹⁰ Martin Caidin, *Black Thursday* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960), 165.

¹¹ Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the*

Spanish Civil War, Contributions in Military History, No. 35 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); and Holger Nauroth and Werner Held, *Messerschmitt Bf110: Zerstörer an allen Fronten, 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1978), passim.

¹² Details of the victory are based on Schob's flight log, a photocopy of which was provided me by Werner Girbig, Hattersheim, Germany, on Mar. 7, 1988. Schob was one of the rare German pilots to fight throughout World War II and survive. By Mar. 1945 Schob was serving with a unit flying Focke-Wulf 190s. His unit was dissolved unceremoniously when news arrived that American forces were advancing toward them. The men began melting into the countryside, slowly making their way home. Schob was by this time a captain with five hundred combat missions, and credited with twenty-eight air victories, including ten four-engine Allied bombers. He died in Frankfurt in 1981.

¹³ Leland A. Dowden, *One and One Half Missions* (San Mateo, Calif.: Western Book/Journal Press, 1989), 45-46.

¹⁴ Martin Caidin, *The Night Hamburg Died* (New York: Ballantine, 1960).

¹⁵ Aschaffenburg, Germany, *Main-Echo*, July 18, 1987, 23.

¹⁶ Alois Stadtmüller, *Maingebiet und Spessart im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aschaffenburg: Geschichts- und Kunstverein Aschaffenburg e.V., 1982), 177-78.

¹⁷ Hans Heinri Stapfer, *Strangers in a Strange Land* (Carrollton, Tex.: Squadron/Signal Publications, Inc., 1988), 17-19, 49-54.

¹⁸ Leo V. Bishop, Frank J. Glasgow, and George A. Fisher, *The Fighting Forty-Fifth* (Baton Rouge: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1946); and Thomas J. Howard, *The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe, 1944-1945* (Augsburg, Germany: J. P. Himmer KG, 1945).

¹⁹ Basic sources on the AGRC are today hard to find. Edward Steere, "The Graves Registration Service in World War II," *Historical Studies*, No. 21, Office of the Quartermaster General (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1951); and Edward Steere and Thayer M. Boardman, "Final Disposition of World War II Dead: 1945-51," *Historical Studies, Series II*, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Quartermaster General, 1957). There is a recent summary of this information for the European theater, W. Raymond Wood and Lori Ann Stanley, "Recovery and Identification of World War II Dead: American Graves Registration Activities in Europe," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 34 (1989):1365-73.

²⁰ Personal communication from Harry L. Shapiro to author, Nov. 4, 1987.

²¹ The narrative of the discovery and identification of Lieutenant Wood is abstracted from his 293 file. For data on the MRES, see Evelyn Boyd and Eric Munday, "The Missing Research and Enquiry Service," *Air Clues* 40 (1986): 187-90.